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NAVAL AND MARINE CORPS CASUALTIES IN THE WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

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INFORMATION on the naval casualties occurring in the various wars in which the United States has been engaged is not readily available. There is a great amount of information on the subject but no attempt has been made to sift it, produce accurate and authentic figures for each war, and assemble it in one place.

Many difficulties arise in trying to arrive at accurate figures in regard to the number of naval casualties, and these have been responsible, no doubt, for the disparity which exists in various publications and reports of the number of killed and wounded in the wars the United States has seen. One of the difficulties, of course, in the earlier conflicts is the absence of original records. In the case of the American Revolution for example and some of the other earlier wars, many of the medical journals, and lists of killed and wounded submitted by the surgeon's reports to the commanding officer, and similar original sources of information are no longer in existence or cannot be located. Printed accounts often show considerable differences in the number of casualties in naval battles and the figures given by one naval historian are often at variance with those of another writer.

One of the principal reasons for variation in figures of killed or wounded in any particular action is the lack of a uniform definition of a casualty. Some authors give only those who were killed in action; others give killed and died of wounds in the list of killed; others list those who subsequently died of wounds among the wounded, but not among the killed. It is easy to see how confusing figures have arisen in such cases. Some casualty reports contain missing, prisoners, or those who died of disease, and others do not include these groups. We have too, the question of whether war casualties are to include killed and injured in accidents during military operations or those who were lost at sea in shipwreck. In some reports these are included, in others they are not.

During World War I, cases that were gassed were included among the wounded in some reports and omitted in other lists. It is thus seen that before the reports of casualties in different wars can be compared, some common definition of casualties must be adopted and followed in correlating the statistics.

An example of some of the difficulties in obtaining authentic information is to be found in studies of the naval casualties in the American Revolution. It is not only that records are fragmentary or entirely absent, but confusion arises from the presence of several different naval organizations. During the American Revolution, the maritime forces of the Colonies belonged to three main groups. One were naval vessels and personnel authorized and provided by the Continental Congress which formed what might be termed the regular navy of the Revolution. These corresponded in a general way to land forces of similar origin, the Continental Line, or regular army troops of the Revolutionary armies. A second group consisted of state navies in which the ships and officers and men were provided by the individual colonies, in fact, a naval militia. A third group were the privateers. Some of these latter sailed with letters of marque granted by the Continental Congress or its agents; others were given by the individual colonies.

In three important naval actions of the American Revolution only combined losses of killed and wounded are obtainable. In the battle between the *Bon Homme Richard* and the *Serapis*, Paul Jones gave the American losses as about 150 killed and wounded. At the engagement on Lake Champlain between American and British flotillas in 1776, General Arnold, the American Commander gives "60 killed and wounded" as his losses. In the loss of the American frigate *Raleigh* in 1778 off Penobscot Bay, there were 25 killed and wounded. The total of all naval personnel, officers, seamen and marines who were casual-

ties in the American Revolution is 575 without these three engagements. With these additional 235 casualties, the total became 810.

The first naval action of the War of 1812 presents another problem as to what are to be considered as casualties in action. This was the chase of the British frigate *Belvidera* by an American squadron under Commodore John Rodgers. The *President*, on which Rodgers had his broad pennant, led the chase and hotly engaged the *Belvidera* with her bow chasers, and also yawed several times and fired broadsides at her. The *Belvidera* replied with two stern chasers and killed and wounded six men with her fire. The greater number of casualties, however, were due to the bursting of one of the *President's* guns, killing and wounding sixteen, including Commodore Rodgers, who had his leg broken. In this affair, some have included the sixteen killed and wounded by the accident with the gun, while others have given only the six killed and wounded by the enemy's fire.

Another source of error in naval casualty figures also exists in the fact that the U. S. Coast Guard which in peace time operates under the Treasury Department, operates under the Navy if a formal declaration of war has occurred or the President considers a National Emergency to exist. In some instances, Coast Guard casualties are given as a part of naval losses and in other cases they are given separately.

A subject which has to be examined in reference to casualties is the question of just what constitutes a war. Many of the engagements in which there were at times considerable losses were not technically wars, that is, there had been no formal declaration of war and the countries were theoretically at peace. Such was the naval war with France in 1798-1800 which has been well named the "Quasi Naval War with France." Other examples are the attack on the Korean forts in 1871, the Boxer Rebellion, and the temporary occupation of Haiti and Nicaragua. There are many such incidents in which naval forces have been in armed conflict with military units of countries with which the United States was

officially at peace.

Because of the various usage of the word "casualty" and the lack of a clear conception of what constitutes a war, in discussions of war losses, a precise and concrete statement and definition of these two things must precede any study of the problem.

The term "casualty" has been used here as meaning a person killed or wounded in action with an enemy. The term includes those injured by their own weapons if employed against an enemy as from the bursting of a gun, or explosion of a grenade during the course of a battle. Among the wounded have been included those who subsequently died of wounds. However, prisoners, and those missing, died of disease, died from accident, lost at sea or in shipwreck, are not included. Whenever figures in regard to any of these groups are given they are set apart from killed and wounded and definitely indicated. Wars have not been limited to those conflicts in which a formal declaration of war was made but include undeclared and minor wars, some of them scarcely more than mere landing parties for punitive or protective purposes. In all wars in which a formal declaration has been made, U. S. Coast Guard casualties have been excluded.

An example of forgotten actions where, nevertheless, severe fighting occurred, is the battle of Novaleta during the Philippine Insurrection. Here a battalion of Marines captured some rifle pits and a blockhouse, and the town of Novaleta on October 8, 1899. Two officers and 9 men were wounded, two of the men being wounded so severely that they subsequently died. About 50 men were overcome by heat and exhaustion.

The principal sources of information include American State Papers (Naval Affairs), the Reports of the Secretary of the Navy, and Reports of the Surgeon General of the Navy. For earlier wars, published books such as Theodore Roosevelt's *Naval War of 1812*, Cooper's *Naval History of the United States*, Allen's *Naval History of the American Revolution*, Lossing's *Field Book of the Revolution*, and similar works have been used. The Naval

Records of the Rebellion have been consulted in the American Civil War. The Naval Records and Library of the Navy Department, and the Historical Division of the Head-

and the total of killed and wounded for each war.

Although the Wars against the so-called Barbary States lasted from 1800 to 1804, the

TABLE I
U. S. NAVY AND MARINE CORPS CASUALTIES—VARIOUS WARS, LANDING PARTIES,
OCCUPATIONS, AND PRIMITIVE EXPEDITIONS—
(FIGURES INCLUDE OFFICERS AND MEN)

War	Navy		Marine Corps		Total
	Killed	Wounded	Killed	Wounded	
American Revolution ^a	342	114	49	70	810
Naval War with France	14	31	6	11	62
Barbary Wars	31	54	2	4	91
War of 1812	265	439	45	66	815
Suppression of Piracy in West Indies 1822-25	3	5	0	0	8
Punitive Landing at Quallah Battoo, Sumatra, 1832	2	7	0	4	13
Seminole War, 1835-42	0	0	2	6	8
Mexican War	1	3	11	47	62
Operations against Indian, Puget Sound, 1855	3	1	0	0	4
Civil War, 1861-65	2,112	1,710	64	144	4,030
Korea, 1871	2	10	1	0	13
Spanish American War	10	47	6	21	84
P. I. Insurrection	9	0	2	11	22
Samoa 1899	4	3	0	2	9
Boxer Rebellion, 1900	4	26	16	51	97
Pacification of Nicaragua, 1911-13	0	0	5	16	21
Occupation of Vera Cruz, 1914	17	57	4	12	90
Pacification of Haiti, 1915-34	2	0	7	29	38
Pacification of Dominican Republic, 1916-24	0	0	14	55	69
World War I	59	292 ^b	1,452	10,527 ^c	12,330 ^d
Nicaragua Pacification, 1927-33	1	2	32	117	152
Sinking of Panay, 1937	0	45 ^e	0	0	45
World War II	34,594	40,746	19,369	64,264	159,495 ^f

^a Continental ships only. State navies and privateers not included. 235 additional listed as *killed and wounded* are included in the total.

^b Also 408 lost at sea.

^c Under wounded include 986 casualties from gas.

^d 856 missing and 1,174 prisoners of war not included.

^e 2 mortally wounded and 11 seriously wounded.

^f 11,262 missing and 3,605 prisoners not included.

quarters of the Marine Corps have many sources of information on naval and Marine Corps casualties. The original medical journals of individual ships are available in some instances.

Table I gives a list of conflicts in which Navy and Marine Corps casualties occurred, the number of killed, the number of wounded,

number of casualties in combat was not large. They occurred in the following actions:

- (1) Engagement with gunboats off Tripoli, 28 July 1804—One killed and thirteen wounded.
- (2) Engagements with gunboats off Tripoli, August 7, 1804. Twelve

killed and six wounded. One lieutenant and one midshipman were killed and one sergeant of the Marines. The greater number of these casualties occurred when the magazine of one of the gunboats exploded.

- (3) Loss of the *Intrepid*, September 4, 1804, three officers and ten men killed.
- (4) The boarding and burning of the *Philadelphia* on February 16, 1804. One man slightly wounded.

listed in Table II, thus bringing together in one place the losses in some of the most historic engagements of our Navy, many of them connected with the greatest of our naval traditions. The figures given are for the American ships.

The differences in reports as to the number of casualties in any given action is well illustrated by some of these in the War of 1812. In the famous engagement between the *Chesapeake* and *Shannon*, the casualties are given as 48 killed and 96 wounded. Yet an actual count of the names show 97 names in

TABLE II
CASUALTIES IN SOME NAVAL ENGAGEMENTS OF THE WAR OF 1812

	Navy		Marines		Total
	Killed	Wounded	Killed	Wounded	
Constitution and Guerriere	6	6	1	1	14
United States and Macedonian	4	5	2	1	12
Wasp and Frolic	5	5	0	0	10
Constitution and Java	8	23	1	2	34
Battle of Lake Erie	22	79	4	13	118
Enterprise and Boxer	1	12	0	1	14
Peacock and Epervier	0	2	0	0	2
Wasp and Reindeer	5	21	0	0	26
Hornet and Penguin	0	10	1	0	11
Battle of Lake Champlain	47	47	4	10	108
Chesapeake and Shannon	36	77	12	20	145

Included in the total are the casualties in Decatur's squadron in 1815 in the capture of the Algerian flagship *Mashuda* off Cape deGat. Most of these resulted from the bursting of a gun on the *Guerriere*. This was Decatur's flagship and in his report, he states five were killed and thirty wounded by the bursting of a maindeck gun and only four wounded by the enemy. These figures are at variance with those given in a history of our Navy published in recent years where the casualties are given as 4 killed and 10 wounded mostly by the bursting of a gun. For the entire conflict, or rather conflicts, with the Barbary States, the casualties were 33 killed and 58 wounded; a total of 91.

The casualties in some of the principal engagements of the War of 1812 have been

the list of wounded. This makes the total 145 instead of 144. Thirteen of the wounded are listed as "since dead" and again presents a possibility of variation in different published statements as some of these or all of them might be included among the killed. These casualty lists of the War of 1812 have another thing which might lead to differences in published reports. The list of dead was often signed by the Purser and the list of wounded by the Surgeon. Dangerously wounded cases dying shortly after being received in the cockpit or other place used as a battle dressing station might be included among the killed and either dropped from the list of wounded or never added to it.

In the Battle of Lake Erie, three soldiers from the 17th and 26th regiments are among

the list furnished by Commodore Perry. A small number of troops had been sent on board to augment the crews of the American vessels which were much depleted by sickness. The *Niagara* had 28 men on the sick list unfit for duty on the day of the action and there were 57 more on the small vessels unable to perform duty.

The suppression of piracy in the West Indies by a "mosquito squadron" although the

this brief war may be a matter of interest. The losses sustained at Guantanamo, Cuba, June 11-20, 1898, were in the Marine Battalion Atlantic Fleet, landed there on the former date. All these casualties were Marines except one, a medical officer of the Navy, killed shortly after the landing.

The loss on the *Maine* of 2 officers and 251 men was increased by the death of seven others making a total of 258 dead. The complement

TABLE III
CASUALTIES IN ACTION—SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

	Number of Casualties	Killed	Wounded	Died subsequently as result of wounds
Action at Manila Bay (May 1)	9		9	
Action off Cienfuegos (May 11)	12	1	11	1
Action off Gardenas (May 11)	8	5	3	
Action off San Juan, Porto Rico (May 12)	8	1	7	
Engagement at Guantanamo, Cuba (June 11 to 20)	22	6 ^a	16	
Engagement off Santiago (June 22)	10	1	9	
Engagement off Santiago (July 3)	11	1	10	
Miscellaneous				
Yankee (June 13)	1		1	
Eagle (July 12)	1		1	
Bancroft (August 12)	1	1		
Amphitrite (August 7)	1		1	1 ^b
Total	84	16	68	2

^a One accidentally killed.

^b Accidentally shot.

operations covered the year from 1822 to 1825 resulted in a very small loss from actions with the piratical forces. The total was only 3 killed and 5 wounded. Loss from disease, particularly yellow fever, however, was heavy and resulted in many deaths. At one time the squadron was seriously crippled by yellow fever.

The naval casualties for each engagement of the Spanish-American War is given in a separate table taken from the report of the Secretary of the Navy for 1898, and the Surgeon's General Report for that year. It is reproduced here because the number of killed and wounded in the various engagements in

of the *Maine* at the time of the disaster was 355, of whom 39 were Marines and 26 officers. This left 95 survivors and only 40 of these were uninjured. Loss on the USS *Maine* preceding the war, 2 officers and 251 men.

The desperate character of the fighting at sea and in amphibious operations in World War II is shown by the high casualties occurring on individual ships. On one heavy cruiser, for example, every officer and man was killed or wounded. The losses of aviation groups, submarine crews, and the initial waves of landing forces at times were extremely high. Forces engaged in mining and mine-sweeping operations, removal of underwater

obstructions and similar tasks involved special hazards. The Marine Corps suffered heavily in the operations connected with amphibious landings, and naval personnel in the beach parties shared their dangers and losses.

The figures on casualties in World War II are not yet final due to the changes which will result from the return of prisoners of war some of whom were listed as missing or dead. It is probable that one or two more years will be required before the numbers on the casualties of World War II can be adjusted to a final figure.

When the total number of killed and wounded among naval personnel in all the actions in which our Navy has been engaged prior to World War II are compared with the total Navy and Marine Corps casualties in that war, the extent and severity of the conflict is more fully appreciated. For all previous wars, there were 4,599 killed and 14,039 wounded, with a total of 18,638.

The Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Navy Department is the official agency in charge of the records of casualties, except prisoners of war and missing in action, and statistics on the subject have been studied with much care. The casualty figures arrived at are tentative and not final as some information regarding prisoners of war and missing are even yet not available. The figures which

follow are for casualties against an organized enemy from December 7, 1941 and were computed to July 15, 1946.

Navy—Officer	7,361
Navy—Enlisted	67,979
Navy—Total	75,340
Marine Corps—Officer	4,371
Marine Corps—Enlisted	79,262
Marine Corps—Total	83,633
Rank, rate, and service unknown	522
Grand total of officers and men, Navy and Marine Corps	159,495

Thus World War II saw more than eight times the number of killed and wounded among our naval personnel than in all the other wars of the United States in its entire history as a nation.

There are many interesting statistical fields yet to study in our naval casualties such as the percentage of losses in relation to the total personnel; relative losses of officers and men; losses in different corps and branches of the service; losses in individual ships and organizations; casualties suffered in different parts of the ship in naval actions; and casualties inflicted by different types of weapons; and on different types of ships. These will furnish many interesting problems and fields of investigation for the student of naval warfare.